

Barriers and possibilities to community participation and involvement in juveniles' life

07 Gennaio 2020

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Abstract

Communities' participation and involvement in juveniles' life are becoming important topics featuring after the implementation of New Criminal Code in Romania, in 2014. The positive associations of participation in educative centers activities (e.g., socio-cultural activities, educational courses, sports activities, vocational training, etc.), including reduction of recidivism, improvement of wellbeing and contributions to self-worth, are increasingly recognized.

In response to this research gap an interview have been conducted with professionals ($N = 22$) from educative centers in Romania. A thematic analysis of this data identifies that various formal and informal participation initiatives exist, but several barriers impede (structural) communities' participation. Implementing and increasing the participation and involvement of communities requires organizational and cultural changes.

The article concludes by discussing practical issues raised by the study, as well as some limitations. It provides impetus to organize and increase participation in educative centers activities, taking into account the diverse characteristics, needs and competences of the educative center's population.

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1. Introduction

The internment in an educative centre function is ideally a mechanism which regulates the protection and enforcement of a system of values and norms, determined by society by means of a democratic process. **Internment in an educative centre teaches juveniles to refrain from their criminal behaviour whilst potential offenders are reminded that there is price attached to crime.**

Internment in an educative centre deprives the offender of his/her most fundamental human right to freedom and movement of association. Internment in an educative centre therefore seeks to protect the community and to rehabilitate offenders. If the ideal of this educative measure is to rehabilitate offenders in order to become law-abiding citizens, it is the community where the juvenile comes from and to which he/she will return after his/her release which should be more involved.

An important feature of the educative center is the weight change of actions in holding safety, education and psychosocial support. This feature is highlighted by the effective occupation of the time of interned children through their involvement in educational programs developed in the center or in the community [1]. Among a community's many functions is its ability to support the growth of individual members, to regulate the distribution of goods and services, to socialize its members and facilitate inclusion.

Community involvement has been one of the important components of the criminal justice system in order to achieve the successful rehabilitation and treatment of criminal offenders.

Nowadays many jurisdictions put much emphasis on support from the community in providing various services as well as in earning understanding on the difficult work involved both institutional and community-based treatments of criminal offenders. The smooth reintegration into society and the tough-care of criminal offenders cannot be done without community involvement [2]. When it comes to providing meaningful resources for youth and families before, during, and after crises, it is important to understand the impact a weakened community has on young people and their families as a unit. In very practical terms, a community's capacity to provide resources will predict far more the success of individual community members than any singular Herculean effort by one hardy young person [3].

2. The Concept of Community Involvement in Juveniles' Life

The meaning of community involvement in juveniles' life is a partnership between civilian individuals within the community and the educative centre authorities. Community involvement in educative centers seeks to bring together prison authorities and the community in an effort to understand mutual problems and concerns and requires meaningful communication and dialogue. The argument for greater community involvement in educative centre is that problems within educative cannot be addressed in a meaningful way unless the community is involved together with educative administrators in an attempt to solve these problems [3].

Community involvement in juveniles' life requires the active and voluntary participation of the public, and it requires educative centers officials to respond to problems in the community in a different way.

Community involvement assumes a need for greater accountability of educative centers authorities, greater public participation in decision making and greater concern for civil rights and liberties by educative centers authorities. Consensus about educative centers and offenders may be achieved through sufficient and meaningful representation in the decision-making process and through interaction with the educative center's officials.

It is important to note the potential and practical role the community can play in terms of providing input and support. For successful community involvement in educative centers to occur, both community groups and educative centers officials have to work towards a better acceptance of each other. Increased cooperation may result in improved perceptions on both sides, with educative centers administrators being willing and able to relinquish some of their controlling role in favour of decentralization of activities of and the institution.

3. Method

In response to this research gap an interview have been conducted with professionals ($N = 22$) from educative centers in Romania (Buzias Educative Centre and Targu – Ocna Educative Centre).

4. Results

Creating community support for educative centers begins by working closely with structures or groups that normally report on or inspect local educative centers facilities. These not only look after the rate of internment, victim rehabilitation but also help ameliorate the stigma and exclusion surrounding the event of internment. Civil society NGOs are crucial components of a community involvement philosophy. It is also for this reason that some kind of extra- departmental and social intervention has been sought through the appointment of visitors of educative centers from outside the educative centers set-up [3].

Community participation in juveniles' life can be two-fold, namely: a) collaboration between community members and educative centers staff and secondly, b) community-based rehabilitation programmes for deviants.

a) **The first form of community participation is direct collaboration between community members and educative centers staff in such components of juveniles' treatment programme where the security of educative centers is not affected.** Mutual exchange of information between educative centers authorities and the community will be the cornerstone of a long-term partnership and assist in clearing biases and assumptions of both concerned. This will also encourage a better acceptance from both sides. Educative centers officials who have closely interacted with juveniles are powerhouses of tacit knowledge about educative centers, juveniles and law governing the two. **The knowledge needs to be shared with the community.** While building partnership, emphasis should be placed on the needs of the community and that of the juveniles. These interventions include advocating for juveniles' rights, monitoring adherence to human rights standards, educating the educative centers staff about amendments to existing law, sharing international best practices and innovative success stories with the educative centers staff and collaborating with other like-minded NGOs to ameliorate the reform process. Educative centers staff can also collaborate with NGOs to educate the public about the actions being taken to reform educative centers and juveniles. This would secure the transparency of the prison system and help the community in understanding the limitations of educative centers management and the efforts being made by educative centers staff.

b) **Community based rehabilitation programmes for deviants in educative centers can range from humanitarian approaches helping them build a strong foundation for themselves, targeting spiritual development, physical and mental health, education and job placement, and involvement in community services.** This involves direct interaction of NGOs with the juveniles. Programs can be customised for children, juveniles, adults and the elderly. NGOs have also involved themselves in providing family counseling, and providing means of easy transition for the prisoner back to the society. This includes performing a need-based assessment of the juveniles, and providing them the appropriate training and skill that might become a sustainable means of livelihood when he reintegrates in the society. NGOs can also educate members of society to make them more accepting of ex-prisoners.

The need for community education about educative centers and juveniles is of utmost importance both to the community and the Correctional Services as the community is uninformed about events and programmes happening inside educative centers. The community needs to be informed about purpose of internment, educative centers programmes, rehabilitation of offenders and re-integration into community [4]. The community also needs to know about offenders and visitors' rights. The community should be educated about how, its members can interact with educative centers. A knowledge of offender's rights could inform the way they interact with juveniles and their expectations of the educative centers system. This is to enable communities to get better understanding of how system works and what it does, so that they can interact with it. Some sectors of the community have their misconceptions about offenders.

Through education the community can change its view about educative centers and offenders.

Members of the community should become empowered by learning about juveniles' rights and playing a part in shaping the incarceration environment for offenders. Community members can be empowered to have greater knowledge as ordinary members of the community. For example, knowledge of the rights to visit could facilitate their visits to juveniles as they could then insist on visits and length of visits.

A national network independent of Correctional Services comprising of various organisations and community structures should be established. This network would serve to provide information and education which would strive to empower communities and encourage their involvement in educative centers. This network would reach out to members of community and educate them as well.

The training of community leaders could be carried out through this network. Resources and expertise to local communities should be provided in order to promote assistance in their engagement with the educative center's authorities [4]. **Non-Governmental Organisations which are presently working for reform in corrections should assist in this process.** Community workshops should be organised whereby local educative centers Officials and the community can be involved in a process of discussing the establishment of a working relationship [5].

The involvement of the community in juveniles' life should be viewed as an opportunity to lessen the gap and connect juveniles with the community. By knowing the concerns of the community, educative centers authorities will have a chance of improving their programmes according to needs of the community and offenders they serve. The promotion of child's competences and the facilitation of constructive peer contacts and friendship are important aspects on which the institution aimed to promote child's resiliency. **It is also recommended to be supportive and strengthen ties with family and outside the community to promote the best interests of young people and their families, ensuring that educational resources, moral and spiritual are in a direct line with their specific needs** [6].

The community at large expects more from the government to run facilities in accordance with the goals of the community and to creatively reduce recidivism by focusing on individual restraint. What is needed, however is a clear direction, a realistic statement of expectations, and a willingness to give innovative programs a chance to work. The interest of the community and that of the juveniles are the most important. Efforts in the form of rehabilitation programmes must be made available and they must conform to community prescriptions.

5. Conclusions

Informing and educating people about what goes on inside their own local educative centre system is no easy task. In fact, many educative centers authorities or administrators make little effort to create ongoing communications between themselves and the public [5].

The time has come when the closed doors of educative centers must be opened for more than just juveniles' bookings and releases. Educative centers have to be opened to the public so that there is a better understanding of what educative centers can and cannot accomplish. No one is better able to communicate the capabilities and limitations of educative centre than those who run them. It is the responsibility of educative centre authorities to let the public know what to realistically expect from public institutions like educative centre, but also for communities to tell educative centre authorities what they expect from them.



Community integration interventions appear to be effective in enhancing the inclusion of children and youth internment in educative centre. In particular, findings from this review highlight that there are potentially many ways to continue to improve the effectiveness of community participation interventions for this group.

These include the need for the development of programmes which facilitate friendships alongside recreational participation, include typically developing peers, consider the activity preferences of children and adolescents in developing programmes, and accommodate individual impairments and needs through grading and adaptive leisure activities [2].

The establishment and successful functioning of community involvement in educative centers can help to improve the treatment of juveniles and running of educative centers by the Department of Reintegration Services. **The educative centers have to be accountable to the community, and more concerned with finding long-term solutions in running of them together with the community they serve. The educative centers authorities must be seen on the ground as professionals and must adapt to interacting with the community.**

The community gives ample support to the efforts of the Educative Centers to promote the spiritual growth and high moral standards of inmates. It has, however, not given enough attention to the needs of inmates who cross over from institutional life to freedom. This is the most critical phase in the reformation of criminal offenders. This is the period when an exconvict, whose need for emotional and material support is most acute, is most vulnerable to suffering relapse. Unfortunately, the community does not provide enough programs and services to smoothen such transition. **This is the area where the community has yet to display its full potential. Considering that faith-based and community organizations have the trained personnel with specific skills and access to large numbers of volunteers and material resources, they can play a more expansive role in ensuring the successful re-entry and integration of ex-convicts into society.**

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TAG: *participation, educative centre, proceedings*

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